



Aknotmaq

news and updates from Tajikeimik

Embracing voices: shaping Mi'kmaw health and wellness through Mawio'mi'ji'j

By Alexa Sylliboy

In a groundbreaking initiative, Tajikeimik – the new and developing Mi'kmaw health and wellness organization – is taking community engagement to a whole new level.

This involves traveling to all 13 Mi'kmaq communities across Nova Scotia; aiming to listen, understand and prioritize the unique health needs of each community; and committing to amplifying Mi'kmaq voices and integrating cultural approaches into health and wellness.

The term mawio'mi'ji'j (small gathering) is coined from the Mi'kmaq word mawio'mi, meaning “gathering of celebration” - celebration of life, culture, ceremony, and health. That is exactly what we are doing, holding small intimate, informative gatherings in each community – a mawio'mi'ji'j.

“We are not fighting to restructure a system, we are fighting to create anew,” said Kevin Christmas, a

participant at the Membertou mawio'mi'ji'j.

This truly captures the essence of our mission. We, as an organization, recognize that true health goes beyond western medicine and that it starts by acknowledging and understanding the diverse wants and needs within each community. Through a series of interactive sessions and open dialogues, Tajikeimik is fostering a culture of inclusivity and collaboration.

It becomes evident that it's not just about identifying problems; it's about co-creating solutions. By involving community members and community health centre teams, and gathering their perspectives on health and wellness, we ensure that the work undertaken by Tajikeimik aligns with the values and aspirations of the communities we serve. These mawio'mi'ji'j engagements go beyond conventional approaches, emphasizing the importance of



Sharon (Paul) Rudderham, Tajikeimik Director of Health Transformation; Darlene Anganis, Membertou Health Director; Lindsay Peach, Tajikeimik Executive Director - at the Membertou mawio'mi'ji'j

cultural sensitivity and community-led solutions.

Tajikeimik believes that by actively involving the Mi'kmaw community in shaping their health and wellness programs, we can create more meaningful and sustainable impacts. The mawio'mi'ji'j are not only a platform for sharing opportunities for improvement, but a testament to

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Pictou Landing mawio'mi'ji'j

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Embracing voices ...continued

Tajiikeimik's commitment to fostering self-determination and community-driven healthcare.

The mawio'mi'ji'j are not a one-time conversation; they are an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement. The insights gathered will inform policy changes, resource allocations, and healthcare practices. This dynamic approach ensures that the healthcare system evolves in tandem with the evolving needs and aspirations of the Mi'kmaw community.

"The mawio'mi'ji'j provided an opportunity for the communities to participate in the creation of the vision for what the new health and wellness organization can be, while giving them the chance to share their ideas and concerns about the current health care system," said Sharon (Paul) Rudderham, Director, Health Transformation. "This gave us information to validate priorities that have been defined by Health Directors and Leadership as we move forward on this pathway."

As our organization continues its journey across Mi'kmaw territories here in Nova Scotia, the series of mawio'mi'ji'j stands as a beacon of hope for a future where health and wellness initiatives are not imposed, but created by the Mi'kmaq.

Tajiikeimik is setting a powerful precedent, proving that by coming together, listening attentively, and respecting diverse perspectives, the path to wholistic health and wellness becomes clearer.

Mawio'mi'ji'j were held last fall in Potlotek on Oct. 18, L'sitkuk-Bear River on Oct. 25, Paqtnkek on Nov. 2, Annapolis Valley on Nov. 7, Glooscap on Nov. 9, Millbrook on Nov. 21, Eskasoni on Nov. 28, Membertou on Nov. 29, Pictou Landing on Dec. 1, and Wagmatcook on Dec. 6. This spring, we are holding mawio'mi'ji'j in Wasoqopa'q-Acadia on March 26, Sipekne'katik on April 4, We'koqma'q on April 18, and at the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre on April 23.



Annapolis Valley mawio'mi'ji'j



Membertou mawio'mi'ji'j



Wagmatcook mawio'mi'ji'j



Glooscap mawio'mi'ji'j



Eskasoni mawio'mi'ji'j



Potlotek mawio'mi'ji'j



Millbrook mawio'mi'ji'j



Wasoqopa'q-Acadia mawio'mi'ji'j



L'sitkuk - Bear River mawio'mi'ji'j



Paqtnekek mawio'mi'ji'j



Sipekne'katik mawio'mi'ji'j

Unable to attend your community's mawio'mi'ji'j or have suggestions to share?

Answer our Talking Circle questions:

Be a voice in shaping our very own health and wellness organization!



<https://mhwns.ca/mawioimi/talking-circle-questions/>



'Baby Smiles,' a Mi'kmaw children's book promotes healthy dental habits for life

Health Directors in Unama'ki developed the resource as an urgent response to dental disease

By Crystal Greene

With childhood tooth decay being common in Unama'ki, its Mi'kmaw Health Directors knew there had to be more prevention education for kids to make brushing and flossing a habit for life.

Sharon (Paul) Rudderham, the Director of Health Transformation at Tajiikeimik, brought the Tui'kn Partnership to the table in 2019, when she was Health Director at Eskasoni First Nation.

Health Directors from Membertou, Eskasoni, Wagmatcook, We'koqma'q and Potlotek brainstormed until a lightbulb for Baby Smiles - Weskewikwa'sit mijua'ji'j went off in Rudderham's head.

Her idea was a children's board book, for ages zero to three, which is a critical time for parents of babies and toddlers to start dental care.

The book illustrates a baby's gums being wiped, brushing teeth as they first come in, and first dental visits by the first birthday.

"Learning for the entire family around the importance of dental care,

that was the reason behind the book," said Rudderham. "It supports dental health for our babies, children and families ... supporting the parents in their ability to read in Mi'kmaw, as well as the children."

Baby Smiles was illustrated by Loretta Gould of We'koqma'q. Anne Marchand did voiceover work for the audiobook version.

It was first written in English by the working group and translated into Mi'kmaw by Floyd Prosper, Kenny Prosper, and Katani Julien.

"I've seen a lot of dental disease amongst small children, to have them referred for hospitalization and knowing that all of that is so preventable," said Floyd Prosper who is a dental therapist from Eskasoni with over 30 years experience. He worked in northern Saskatchewan, Iqaluit and now works in his community under FNIHB and Indigenous Services Canada.

A statement by the Canadian Paediatric Society outlines a troubling statistic: "the rate of dental surgery to treat early childhood caries (cavities) under general anesthesia in Canada was seven times higher for children from communities with



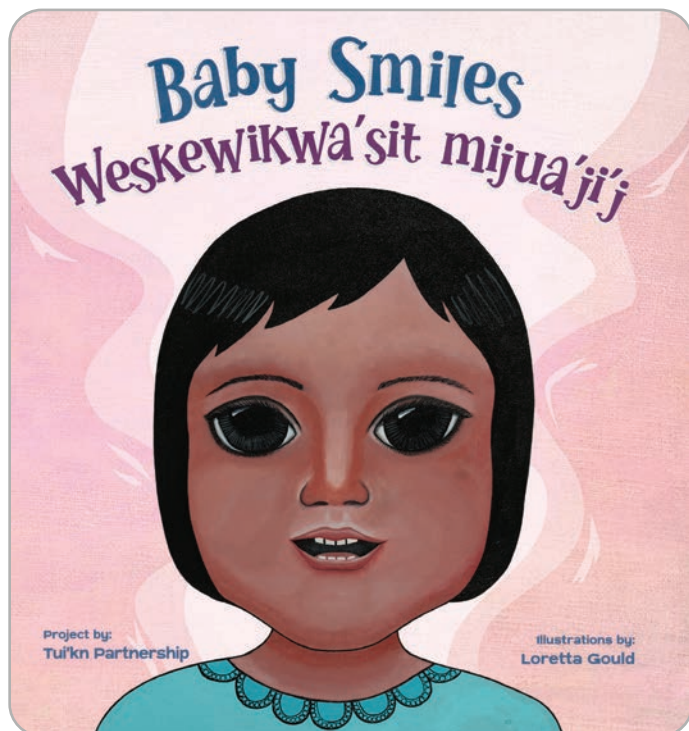
Floyd Prosper and Sharon (Paul) Rudderham reading at the book launch at the Wagmatcook Culture and Heritage Centre, April 2023

a high proportion of Indigenous peoples than communities with lower Indigenous populations."

"What I love about the messaging in this book is that it's positive health promotion that's focused on prevention of disease, which really is at the core of the dental hygiene profession," said Shauna Hachey, a dental hygienist who teaches at the School of Dental Hygiene at Dalhousie University. She was part of the Baby Smiles project team.

"We were encouraging breastfeeding in the book ... not giving babies bottles

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From Baby Smiles - Weskewikwa'sit mijua'ji'j



Baby Smiles - Weskewikwa'sit mijua'ji'j' ...continued

with milk in them to go to bed, water instead to prevent further decay," added Rudderham.

Baby Smiles was officially released on April 20, 2023 during National Oral Health Month. Funding came from the Chronic Disease Prevention and Management: Oral Health Promotion Fund and Indigenous Services Canada.

The book is available to all 13 Mi'kmaw First Nations in Nova Scotia.

As well, it's a new addition to Nova Scotia's Read to Me program, which gives a free bag of books to babies before they leave the hospital, after their moms give birth.

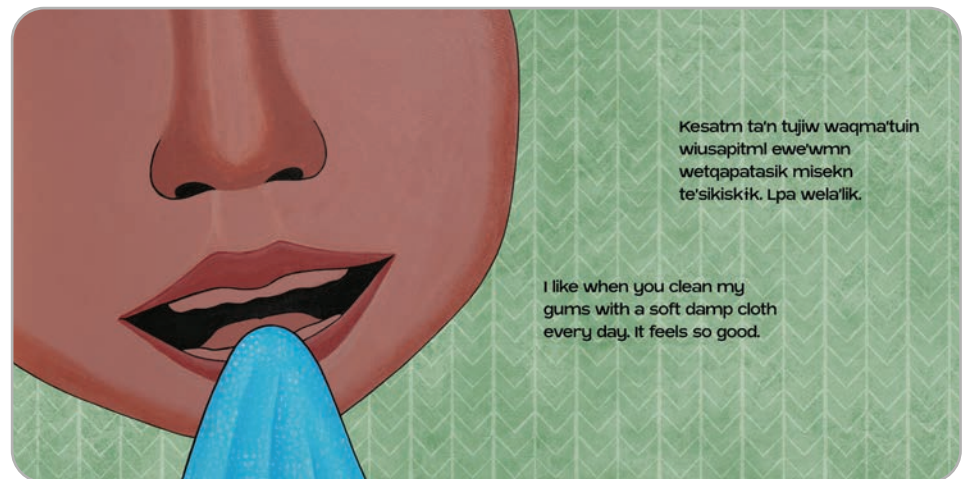
"I'm taking every opportunity to promote the book wherever I can, and with whoever I can," said Prosper who brought copies of Baby Smiles to the cultural village at the 2023 North American Indigenous Games that was held in Kijipuktik-Halifax.

As dental disease is a primary concern for all Indigenous communities, Prosper said that people are interested in the book and would like to see versions of it translated into their own languages.

For now, the hardcopy book, along with dental care aids, such as toothbrushes and toothpaste, will continue to be distributed to new Mi'kmaw parents and caregivers in Nova Scotia. And it is available for free as a PDF download, and to watch and listen in Mi'kmaw and in English via Tajikeyimik's website at mhwns.ca/babysmiles.



From Baby Smiles - Weskewikwa'sit mijua'ji'j'



From Baby Smiles - Weskewikwa'sit mijua'ji'j'



Photo at the right: Book launch.
Left to right: Sharon (Paul) Rudderham, Director of Health Transformation, Tajikeyimik; Shauna Hachey, Dental Hygienist and Associate Professor, Dalhousie University School of Dental Hygiene; Elaine Allison, Health Director, Wagmatcook Health; Chief Wilbert Marshall, Potlotek First Nation; Floyd Prosper, Dental Therapist, Eskasoni First Nation; Stacey Lewis, Project Manager, Tui'kn Partnership; Cavelle MacNeil, Administrative Assistant, Tui'kn Partnership

Tajikeimik Early Years, a new program for families is revitalizing Mi'kmaw culture

Babies and their caregivers are being supported via home visits: from pregnancy, through birth and beyond

By Crystal Greene

When Kalolin Johnson, a new mother of one, from Eskasoni First Nation was experiencing postpartum depression, it was Tajikeimik's Early Years program that helped her.

"It pulled me out of my comfort zone, it allowed me to open up new conversations," said Johnson. "I loved everything that came with motherhood, but I always felt like I needed some time to reflect and remember that it's okay not to be okay."

She started in February 2023 as a client and is now employed as a Tajikeimik Early Years home visitor in Eskasoni who tends to caregivers and babies.

Early Years is not your ordinary Healthy Baby program, it fuses traditional, Mi'kmaw parenting practices and culture with western early child development theory.

It's where Johnson, 24, learned about cedar baths, placenta burials, medicine pouch making and belly button teachings. It has sparked a cultural revitalization that is becoming part of parenting journeys in Mi'kma'ki.

"We co-developed this Early Years program, it's Mi'kmaw specific, it's within our culture," said MaryI Joe-Francis, who has seen a difference

of cultural context and language barriers in other similar programs. "Nobody can tell a parent how to parent, we have to meet parents where they're at in their parenting journey."

Joe-Francis is based in Membertou as the Tajikeimik Early Years Program Development Coordinator. The program was developed in partnership with the Martin Family Initiative (MFI).

MFI works in collaboration with Indigenous communities to advance family, educational, and economic well-being outcomes for children and youth. MFI has co-developed Early Years programs in other places such as Maskwacis Cree Nation in Alberta - where the pilot launched in 2018 - and later spread to Yukon and Nunavut. In each community, their Early Years program is grounded in the language and culture of the local community.

Joe-Francis works closely with Jane Casson, an operations manager with MFI who supports Early Years managers and programs across Canada.

"MFI came with templates for curriculum, but it was the communities that ultimately decided how to adapt the curriculum



Kalolin Johnson with baby Zyla Karol Bernard

according to their Mi'kmaw ways of knowing," said Casson.

Joe-Francis, MFI and Tajikeimik spent over a year co-developing a customized curriculum with input from Mi'kmaw elders and knowledge keepers to create what she describes as "a home visiting program with a holistic approach."

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Home Visitors doula training



Tajiikeimik Early Years ...continued

The elders and knowledge keepers gave consent to be recorded and they shared stories of how they cared for babies and how things were done by their ancestors.

The program was developed with an Etuaptmunk - Two-Eyed Seeing approach. It weaves traditional, Mi'kmaw ways of knowing, imparted by elders and knowledge keepers, with western early childhood development theories.

Community Health Directors were consulted on their population data, to understand the needs of each community.

A toolbox of 100 Mi'kmaw culturally relevant flashcards were designed for the Tajiikeimik Early Years Home Visitors to use as ice-breakers and for activities when visiting caregivers and babies. The curriculum includes a 45-hour course for Mi'kmaw Home Visitors.

"The Early Years supports young families during the most important phases of their child's development to ensure parents and caregivers have the tools they need to be their children's first and best teachers," said Joe-Francis.

The program recognizes that a child's primary caregiver can be a

parent; grandparent; extended family member; foster parent; or a kinship, two-spirit or other family member. All are welcome.

Last year, the program rolled out in Membertou, Eskasoni, Paqtnkek, Potlotek, and the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre in Kijipuktik. Tajiikeimik plans to have the program be available to all Mi'kmaw families in Nova Scotia.

"In the way that we can support our mothers, we do whatever they feel they need for that month," said Johnson, who often delivers care packages. "My hope for the future is that we continue to hire new Visitors and that we get a male Home Visitor so that men (as fathers) can also get the support that our women are receiving."

For more information on the Tajiikeimik Early Years program, please contact Tajiikeimik at taji@mhwns.ca.



Our health & wellness goals - meet some of our team!



Travis Dahms
 Communications Specialist ~
 Membertou Office

My health and wellness goal is to resume skiing and try to increase the outdoor activities I'm doing. I think spending time on physical activity and especially in nature is very important to your overall health and wellness, so I

look forward to a year spent getting outside as much as possible!

Matthew Collier
 Financial Data Analyst ~
 Membertou Office

My health goal is to become more physically active this year and my wellness goal is to connect more with our Mi'kmaw roots with language, crafts, and traditions. Something I am looking forward to is the

big mawio'mi we are hosting. I am looking forward to seeing what will be shared from the mawio'mi ji'js we've been having, looking forward to seeing what services communities need, and looking forward to seeing how we can work together to figure out how to make these things happen for our communities.



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Our health & wellness goals - meet some of our team! ...continued



Stacey Lewis
Project Manager ~
Membertou Office
Some things that I'm looking forward to this year are hiking, camping, and eating popcorn made over a campfire.

Charmaine Greencorn
Executive Assistant ~
Membertou Office
My health and wellness goal is to increase my physical activity. Something that I am looking forward to is to take a trip.



Sharon (Paul) Rudderham
Director of Health
Transformation ~ Membertou
Office
My health and wellness goal is to spend more time with family.

Nancy MacIntyre Meagher
Director of Finance ~
Millbrook Office
Over the next year, I'm hoping to spend more time outside and to expand my flower garden. I'm also looking forward to continued engagement with community.



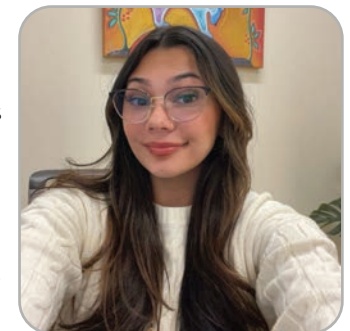
Carolyn Pierce
Director, Communications
and Engagement ~
Millbrook Office
My health and wellness goal for the year is to read 50 books. Some of my favourite authors are Karin Slaughter, Thomas King, Katherine Vermette and Fredrik Backman.

Johnny Bernard
Mi'kmaq Hospital Support
Coordinator ~ Cape Breton
Regional Hospital 3rd Floor
My health and wellness goal is to connect more with nature. Something I am looking forward to over the next year is to work to improve healthcare for patients somehow or someday.



Jenny Morgan
Program Lead: Cultural
Safety & Community Care
Transitions ~ Membertou
Office
My health and wellness goal is to start a walking routine for both my physical and mental well being. I am excited to see what the year will bring!

Alexa Sylliboy
Communications Specialist ~
Membertou Office
My health and wellness goal is to try new things and to drink more water. Something that I am looking forward to over the next year are the endless possibilities it may bring! (and the Tajikeyimik video)



Taking the first step on the path of health transformation - together

In April 2023, the 13 Mi'kmaq Chiefs in Nova Scotia, the Federal Minister of Indigenous Services Canada, and the Nova Scotia Minister of Health and Wellness signed a trilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on transforming the design and delivery of health services for Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia.

"What an important, meaningful day for Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia. Today, we and the Government of Canada, and the Government of Nova Scotia are walking the path of health transformation together... hand-in-hand," said former Lead Chief for Health and Chief of Pictou Landing, Andrea Paul (now Regional Chief Paul).

"By signing the Memorandum of Understanding on Shared Commitments to Action on Health Transformation, we are all committing to collective action to improve the overall health and wellness of Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia," said Regional Chief Paul.

The MOU is the first formal step in the health transformation process. It defines the shared priorities and outlines the process for transferring the design and delivery of federal health services to the Mi'kmaq through Tajikeyimik.

Tajikeyimik works on behalf of the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia. The organization is guided by the 13 Chiefs, Health Directors and Mi'kmaq Grand Council. Tajikeyimik's vision is a healthy, vibrant Mi'kmaq Nation. That will be achieved through greater Mi'kmaq control over resources and decision-making, and by redefining programs and services with wholistic and two-eyed seeing approaches.

Former Regional Chief Paul Prosper (now Senator Prosper) was the signatory witness to the MOU and emceed the event. In his remarks, he thanked the 13 Health Directors.

"Their tireless efforts and their commitment to working together on behalf of their community members, and the Nation as a whole, has driven health transformation. They started the conversations about health transformation, and they carried it along, building momentum, to where we are now. They are on the ground, in community, and they ensure that our health transformation is community-led," he said.

Health Transformation is a complex, multi-year process. Tajikeyimik is just starting year four. Through Health Transformation, Tajikeyimik will work with the provincial health system to transform the way they deliver services, resulting in broad changes to improve health outcomes for Mi'kmaq individuals and communities.

Tajikeyimik is now working, on behalf of Chiefs, with the Government of Canada and the Government of Nova Scotia to draft the next formal step in the health transformation process: the Agreement in Principle. That will lead to a Framework Agreement, which sets out the necessary actions to complete the health transformation process over the next several years.



Kji Saqmaq Norman Sylliboy and Elder Patsy Paul Martin



Senator Paul Prosper (former Regional Chief)



Mi'kmaq of NS Leadership with Minister of Indigenous Services Canada and NS Minister of Health and Wellness



MOU signing attendees, at Millbrook Cultural & Heritage Centre



Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia Health Directors and Tajikeyimik team

Working together differently to improve mental wellness

Through Health Transformation, the governments of Canada and Nova Scotia have agreed to work together differently with the 13 First Nations in Nova Scotia to improve health and wellness services and programs for Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia.

But Tajikeimik and Health Directors are not waiting until transfer is complete before making changes to how programs are funded and delivered. The process of Health Transformation is expected to take several years, but change is happening now.

In 2022-23, Indigenous Services Canada provided \$3.1 million in funding for Mental Wellness and Enhanced Trauma Informed Health and Cultural Supports for Nova Scotia communities.

Instead of individual communities and organizations submitting independent proposals, Tajikeimik reached out to the 13 Health Directors and representatives from CMM, UNSM, Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, Nova Scotia Native Women's Association (NSNWA), Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselling Association (NADACA), and Wabanaki Two Spirit Alliance to collaborate and determine the priorities for creating a comprehensive, high-quality, culturally appropriate, First Nations mental wellness system.

"This was an important example of what is possible through Health Transformation," says Lindsay Peach, Executive Director for Tajikeimik. "By working together differently we engaged communities and partner organizations in discussing their vision for Mi'kmaw mental health and wellness."

By consensus, the communities and partner organizations agreed they wanted to use the funding to strengthen community teams and expand services. As a result, each of the 13 communities and the three organizations (Mi'kmaw Native

Friendship Centre, NSNWA, and NADACA), regardless of their size, were able to hire a new position and/or implement service supports to address their specific mental wellness needs.

The funds are being used to fund positions and contribute toward

improved access to community-based, trauma informed, and culturally safe mental health services.

It was an opportunity to do what was truly needed in each community.



Kwe' - looking for a

Career in Healthcare?

We post healthcare jobs available at Tajikeimik and with our partners on our website. Visit our website often!

mhwns.ca/careers

About Us

Tajikeimik is the emerging health and wellness organization working toward health transformation for Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia. Health transformation is a multi-year process of the Mi'kmaq taking control of our health and wellness resources and decision-making.

Created and guided by the Chiefs and Health Directors from the 13 First Nations in Nova Scotia, Tajikeimik is on a journey to transform the health system to better meet the needs of Mi'kmaw people and communities in Nova Scotia.

Tajikeimik works with communities, Indigenous organizations and partners to enhance existing health and wellness programs and develop new initiatives – while ensuring they are accessible, community-led, rooted in wholistic and two-eyed seeing approaches, and guided by Mi'kmaw culture and values.

Tajikeimik Means: To be healthy

Vision: A healthy, vibrant Mi'kmaq Nation.

Mission:
Elukuti'kw wjit naji-wlo'tinenew utanminal.
We are working toward better health for all in our communities.

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